

RICHARD J. DURBIN  
ILLINOIS

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United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-1501

November 20, 2003

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Federal Communications Commission  
Office of the Secretary

The Honorable Michael Powell  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Powell

I write to support a 'Petition for Reconsideration' to Docket WT Docket No. 99-87, Implementation of Sections 309(j) and 337 of the Communications Act of 1934 as Amended, RM-9332 Promotion of Spectrum Efficient Technologies on Certain Part 90 Frequencies. This petition is extremely vital to continuing the mission of firefighters and emergency medical services in Illinois and several surrounding areas from becoming fully interoperable.

Interoperability allows our firefighters and EMS to coordinate efforts while responding to a terrorist attack, hazardous materials spill, or fire. Illinois' first responders have a system of interoperability known as MABAS, the Mutual Aid Box Alarm System, allowing communication throughout the Chicago area and across Illinois to communicate on a common channel. This system has been in existence since the late 1960's, and was consolidated in communities in and around the City of Chicago. MABAS has expanded from Northern Illinois to include many parts of Central Illinois and Southern Illinois, coordinating areas around St. Louis, Missouri. MABAS is attempting to expand to include the entire state of Illinois along with adjoining communities in Indiana, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin. The deadline of January 13, 2004 to submit applications will prevent the communities from participating in this system.

States, cities, and counties are facing budget deficits and cutting spending. Our firefighters are struggling to purchase equipment that is rated to respond to terrorist attacks and meet their daily responsibilities. Having to replace radio equipment is an additional financial burden many departments will not be able to bear. This is especially true for volunteer fire departments. These departments constantly struggle to maintain equipment, facilities, and provide their firefighters with the proper training they need. Requiring new equipment and technology while helpful in the long term, will be a tremendous short-term burden that will alienate departments and build a technological divide in the fire fighting community.

I understand the need to advance the use of narrowband technology and increasing the efficiency of the spectrum. This has been a process that began in 1992 and has been slow to take effect. While I appreciate the Commission's initiative to advance this process, I hope the Commission will give consideration to the needs of first responders in Illinois who must communicate with each other. I believe the time frame established by the Commission will not allow communities to gather and submit licensing information, purchase necessary equipment,

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*Handwritten notes:*  
ATTN: Mr. Powell  
Public Safety  
PK  
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and join the MABAS system

The 'Petition for Reconsideration' has been filed by a broad range of public safety advocacy groups including, Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International, Inc. (APCO), the International Association of Fire Chiefs, Inc., and the International Municipal Signal Association (IAFC/TMSA), International Association of Chiefs of Police ("IACP"), Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA), National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), Major County Sheriffs' Association (MCSA), and the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC). I welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the status of this petition, narrowbanding and the communications needs of first responders. Thank you, for your consideration of this matter

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

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